

ROCHESTER HISTORY

Edited by DEXTER PERKINS, *City Historian*
and BLAKE MCKELVEY, *Assistant City Historian*

VOL. VII

OCTOBER, 1945

No. 4

Turbulent but Constructive Decades in Civic Affairs: 1867-1900

BY BLAKE MCKELVEY

Rochester had attained full urban status by the end of its first half century of civic existence. Many essential services had been provided, though in no case did they excel the average provisions of comparable American communities. Indeed, in a few respects (notably in the lack of a water system) Rochester still lagged behind cities of the same class. Several problems proved insistent, however, and the last decades of the century witnessed many efforts to provide more adequate community services. In some instances, once they had been sufficiently (if tardily) aroused to the problems at hand, the people of Rochester forged ahead, achieving results that surpassed those of cities earlier on the job.

It is impossible to survey the civic developments of the post-Civil War decades apart from the political personalities involved. The twelve mayors and two hundred-odd aldermen who served for varied terms during these years were confronted by numerous and complex problems. As the city's population grew from 60,000 to 160,000, old functions had to be reorganized and new ones established; huge contracts had to be awarded, valuable franchises granted, and startling budgetary increases were found necessary. So many special interests were involved that the true public interest was frequently obscured.

The conflict of forces was much too complex for traditional party alignments, with the result that a succession of factional "rings" generally determined policy. The crucial battles were decided by flanking

ROCHESTER HISTORY, published quarterly by the Rochester Public Library, distributed free at the Library, by mail 25 cents per year. Address correspondence to the City Historian, Rochester Public Library, 115 South Avenue, Rochester 4, N.Y.

attacks as one or another faction secured amendments from the legislature revising the forms of local government. The creation of a series of commissions in the early seventies, the establishment of an executive board a few years later, and subsequent reorganizations to be noted below, generally achieved improvements in administration, but the factional struggles which occasioned these reforms cannot be overlooked.

Fundamental concepts were frequently modified under the stress of new situations, as when old standards of competition failed in the public utility field, or when "free enterprise" encountered public health and welfare restraints. The precepts of the budget balancers proved less popular during most of these years than the programs for expanding community services, yet the advocates of economy gained renewed influence a few years after the economic collapse of 1873, and again after the crisis of 1893. Perhaps the most fundamental modification in civic thought was the gradual recognition of the expert and the specialist. As the years advanced, engineering problems were entrusted increasingly to engineers, health problems to doctors, and finally school affairs to educators. The ability of the rising political boss, George Aldridge, to learn this lesson doubtless contributed to his success during the next period when Rochesterians were persuaded to entrust their political decisions to his own expert political judgment.

Factional Battles Over Civic Affairs in the Seventies

Political alignments and programs for civic improvement were left in a state of disorder by the Civil War. The split between the Radical Republicans and the Lincoln men was matched by disharmony between the Union Democrats and the old party stalwarts. Henry L. Fish, a Union Democrat, was elected mayor in 1867 with the aid of many Liberal Republicans, former Lincoln men. His re-election the next year (the first mayor in Rochester chosen to succeed himself), and the victory in 1869 of Edward M. Smith, a Liberal Republican, represented the continued dominance of staunch advocates of municipal economy. Unfortunately, most of the basic expenditures were mounting annually (by the late sixties the city "budget" had doubled that of a decade before), moreover the popular demand for long-deferred civic improvements was becoming insistent. Neither the mayor nor the contentious aldermen appeared capable of formulating a program for advance.

Criticism of the council was an old story in American cities generally.

A wide-spread reform, placing selected functions in the hands of independent boards, had relieved the aldermen in many cities of much administrative power. In Rochester such boards had already assumed control over the schools, the public health activities, the cemetery, the police, and the task of making the assessment rolls. Neither the aldermen who happened to belong to the council majority, nor the successive mayors (if they enjoyed council support) favored such "reforms," but the special board did provide a method for circumventing political deadlocks in the council.

Forthright municipal action, entailing major outlays in at least three important fields, could no longer be deferred. The recently constructed court house was not large enough to accommodate city as well as county offices, and in 1870 the county requested the city to prepare to withdraw—a city hall would have to be built. A new building to house the rapidly growing Free Academy was likewise needed, as were other public works. News of the great Chicago fire in 1871 revived the old agitation for a water works. Economy was desirable, but not false economy, and that was how the city's failure to provide a water system began to appear as the reports of devastating fires in Boston and Troy followed in quick succession. Large property owners in the center of Rochester no longer felt secure amidst their brick and stone walls, for similar structures had burned like tinder in other cities, and incendiarism was rife in Rochester.

Unfortunately the aldermen, though impatient for action, were overwhelmed by the number of proposals before them. The site of the First Presbyterian church back of the Court House was acquired for a city hall in 1869, but east-siders, favoring the lot at the corner of East Avenue and Main Street which Hiram Sibley offered to donate to the city, postponed action. Impatient over the delay, the Republican mayor, Charles W. Briggs, joined with the city's Albany representative, George D. Lord, Democrat, in a move to secure a city hall commission. The aldermanic majority, which thus lost control over the contracts, rushed ahead with building operations, at first on the lot back of the Court House, and when an injunction stopped that work, proceeded to build an undesignated city building at a cost of \$85,000, double the original contract, on the old Front Street public market site. The City Hall Commission, backed by aldermen who later secured a share of the contracts, had meanwhile assumed control of the activities back of the Court House. By January, 1875, an imposing, five-story City Hall was

erected there at a total cost of \$335,684.39, not quite 50 per cent above the contract price. Charges and counter charges were exchanged between rival factions, but satisfaction was expressed on all sides when the necessary task was completed.

Long deferred proposals for a Free Academy building, and for the paving of Lake Avenue, among other improvements, were brought to fruition by the creation of a Public Works Commission. Alderman Gorsline, partner of George W. Aldridge, Sr., acting mayor, received the Free Academy contract on a bid of \$117,000, later increased approximately one-third following a change in specifications. Again bitter charges were leveled at the "Ring's" activities. The controversy over the paving of Lake Avenue was likewise full of acrimony. But public impatience for the completion of these sorely needed improvements strengthened the hands of those ready to proceed with construction.

The controversy over the water system proved more far reaching in its consequences. A Water Works Company, organized in 1852 by local capitalists who vainly sought municipal support, had made slow progress in its effort to bring Hemlock Lake water to Rochester. Several miles of a wooden conduit and some distributing pipes had been laid, but although the company held a contract binding the city to use its services, uncompleted gaps in its line held up the flow of water. Moreover the company had exhausted its resources and work was at a standstill. Many aldermen favored a scheme for the pumping of river water through special mains to scattered fire hydrants under the patent of the Holly Company of Lockport. When, finally, the out-of-town bond holders of the Water Works Company foreclosed, thus releasing the city from its former agreement, an investigation was ordered which cast doubt on the utility of the old mains. In desperation the mayor and a citizens association representing central business interests again sought the legislative aid of Assemblyman Lord.

A Water Works Commission, appointed by the mayor, was empowered to build an adequate water system and to finance it with a bond issue up to three million dollars if necessary. Again the conflict of authority was carried to the courts, which upheld the commission as against both the council and the old water company; and again the progress of the job, the largest undertaken by the city up to this date, was marred by questionable practices when the successful bidder turned the huge prize over to the construction company of George D.

Lord. Unfortunately, the chief effect of the loud protests was to depress the city's credit on the bond market so that all hope of floating the huge water works issue at four or five per cent was blasted, and the full three million had to be negotiated in thirty-year bonds at seven per cent.

The commissioners wisely placed the construction details in the hands of a trained engineer, J. Nelson Tubbs. Under his direction the workmen pressed forward with the construction of both the Holly and the Hemlock systems. When the former was ready for use in February, 1874, the concern of many large property owners was relieved. Two years later Hemlock water began to flow into many Rochester homes, and citizens could boast with justice of possessing one of the best water systems in the country. Unexpected suits for damages together with the cost of extending the water mains throughout the city continued to add to the capital outlay, which approached four million by the early eighties. Yet public approval was assured by the excellent character of the water and by the fact that annual fire losses and insurance costs had been cut in half over the decade. Public health benefits, though less easily measured, were not forgotten by citizens developing a new pride in their city's services. Only Brooklyn among all American cities was conceded to have better water.

The successful progress of the water works and other public improvements did not, however, dampen the partisan furies. Henry L. Fish, former Democratic mayor, was sent to the legislature by a non-partisan move engineered late in 1872 by Liberal Republicans determined to oust Lord. The three local dailies joined in demanding an investigation of the several commissions. Public ethics of the day was less outraged by the appearance of aldermen as leading sub-contractors than by the scaling up of contract prices. A citizens' movement, inspired by hopes of economy, launched a drive for the creation of a non-partisan executive board to take over the management of the water system, the fire fighting forces, and other public works.

The executive board, when organized in 1876, was strictly bipartisan in personnel, but with three of its members elected and three appointed by the mayor, the latter official gained the power (for a few years) to determine which of the rival rings should dominate. Henry L. Fish became first president of the practically all-powerful executive board in the same year that Cornelius R. Parsons entered upon the first of his seven successive terms as mayor. The charter reform of 1871

which had increased the mayor's term from one to two years, and the amendment of 1876 which reduced the number of aldermen from two to one for each ward, increased the efficiency of these governmental branches. Mayor Parsons' fourteen years saw a shifting Democratic majority in the council, a potential deadlock which never materialized since few strictly party issues arose. The citizens movement that elected Fish and Parsons held together after a fashion for almost a decade, but as the years advanced the mayor's brief economy messages grew into lengthy state papers projecting an enlarged civic program which the rival political faction ultimately took over.

A fundamental reform, without which the expansion of civic services would have been impossible, was achieved in 1875 when the assessors overhauled the tax base. Varied pressures had secured a slow reduction in the city's total valuation between 1857 and 1871, and an intensive search for "hidden" personal property in bank stock and other securities had scarcely restored the old total. The city's large annexations in 1874 had been made possible by exempting the new territory (which doubled the city's area) from the burden of central district improvements. A reappraisal of property values was necessary, and the assessors, determined to approximate real values, jumped the total valuation from \$15,600,000 to \$61,300,000. Measured against this new base, the advancing expenditures did not appear so extravagant, yet the total net debt likewise quadrupled during the seventies, reaching \$5,800,000 by 1880. The aldermen could no longer boast, as in 1870, that no city of Rochester's size had a lower per capita tax, for the debt charges alone in 1880 almost equalled the total expenditures of 1870. Nevertheless, among the one hundred principal American cities, Rochester's per capita debt ranked 31st in 1880, which appeared scarcely unreasonable considering the extent of her new improvements.

A major portion of the city's debt in the seventies was contracted for industrial rather than civic improvements. A strong popular belief that the city's economic future depended upon the completion of various area railroads prompted the council to issue municipal bonds in support of these enterprises. The \$300,000 loaned to the Genesee Valley Railroad in 1853 was refunded in 1872, and during the next two years \$600,000 was loaned to the Rochester and State Line Railroad and \$150,000 to the Rochester, Nunda and Pennsylvania Railroad. Payments from the Erie, lessee of the Genesee Valley line, were already netting a slight profit over the charges on the bonds issued for that

road, but the prospects of the other two lines were discouraging. The fact that several aldermen were active directors on these roads may have simplified the passage of these bond issues, yet popular approval was outspoken. Cheap coal was one of Rochester's chief industrial and domestic needs, and all three roads promised to bring it.

If some aldermen bemoaned the loss of important powers in the early seventies, new activities, many in old familiar fields, quickly absorbed their attentions. Thus the fire fighters needed not only the Holly water works, but an improved alarm system, and in 1869 the council voted to install one of the first fire alarm telegraphs in the country. Several large theater fires in other cities, with their appalling toll of lives, focused attention in Rochester on the need for theater inspection. An ordinance of 1877 required the construction of fire exits in theaters and factories, the initial step in a long protracted struggle to secure adequate building regulations.

The police department had been reorganized in the mid-sixties and Mayor Parsons was able to praise it in 1879 with generous terms. The Western House of Refuge under state control and the Monroe County Penitentiary, both located on the city's outskirts, served as indirect aids to the local police. The affairs at the Truant Home proved less satisfactory, and doubts were developing as to the propriety of correcting truancy by institutional treatment. When in 1876 an investigation disclosed that the average cost per inmate was two dollars a week, the institution was closed; 36 of the children were divided between the Protestant and Catholic orphan asylums, where the cost to the city was one dollar a week, while 23 other children were placed in private homes.

The successful establishment of six orphan asylums, two homes for aged persons, and two private hospitals before this date represented a real achievement but left the major burden for poor relief on the city. Despite the good times and the huge outlays on public works the expenditures in the poor department doubled between 1868 and 1872, exceeding \$75,000 in the latter year, when a careful check revealed that one in thirteen of the city's estimated 10,000 families had received aid from the poor fund. The depression of the mid-seventies seriously aggravated the problem. Unemployment became so severe that at least one out of every ten families was compelled to seek relief. An expenditure of \$98,688 was necessary in 1873, and again in 1875, and the annual outlays exceeded \$80,000 during the rest of the decade.

Closely related to the problems of poor relief were those of public health. The old pest house for contagious diseases was abandoned and Hope Hospital established in its stead, an institution later declared to have been mis-named. An active vaccination campaign in 1871 checked a smallpox epidemic that year. The task of keeping mortality records was undertaken. Numerous complaints were investigated, those against a neighbor's outhouse still being the most numerous. In the summer of 1873, when the licensed scavengers neglected their job, the board of health assumed responsibility for collecting garbage. The scavengers had proved efficient only when the demands of neighboring farmers placed a premium on swill. The board, reasoning that public health was endangered, built six water-tight box carts and employed teamsters at five dollars a day to make regular collections, dumping the surplus not sold to farmers into the river below the falls.

No field of civic activity presented more complex problems than the public highways, where the laying of sewer, water, and gas pipes, and the construction of street car tracks, had damaged many surfaces, compelling frequent repairs. Petitions for the extension of improved surfaces into the outlying wards, for better street lights, and for cement or stone sidewalks in place of the old boardwalks, joined with the new demand for street sprinkling and for the removal of ashes to boost the outlays almost annually until 1877, when the economy program became effective, stopping all new improvements.

The authorities shied away from two major public works. New bridges were needed to facilitate communications across the river and the canal, but the recent construction of the 922-foot Vincent Place bridge at a cost of \$145,000 postponed other efforts in this field for many years. In like fashion the sewer problem appeared insurmountable. A total of 61 miles of sewers had been completed by 1875, serving nearly half the street mileage, but most of the sewers had been constructed as independent enterprises, generally for drainage purposes. Complaints of escaping sewer gas, suits for damages caused by flooding sewers, fears of a cholera epidemic, prompted a survey of the problem in 1876. Unfortunately, the estimated cost for a satisfactory sewer system was reported to reach nearly half the city's assessed valuation and the project was quickly shelved.

Among other improvements deferred by the economy drive of the late seventies was the proposal for a large public park. The last opportunity to acquire Falls Field passed, and the renewed campaign to

convert the low east bank of the river south of the canal into a park gained little support. The park committee of the council busied itself with such annual tasks as repairing and painting the fences and seeding over the foot-paths beat by inconsiderate citizens who persistently cut across the small public squares. Ball players and carpet cleaners inspired complaints to the police; picnickers were more generously welcomed to the grounds of Mount Hope, the public cemetery which had by the seventies grown into a shady and refreshing resort for hot summer afternoons, easily accessible as it now was by the aid of the horse cars.

Public Utilities and Civic Affairs: 1867-1900

Many community functions, long on the border line between public and private enterprise, required increased attention from the civic authorities. This was especially true of the horse car and steam railroads, the gaslight companies, the electric and telephone companies — the utilities most important in Rochester during the nineteenth century. Improved facilities were desired, and for a time special favors seemed in order; loose contracts were drawn; but soon the desire for reduced rates prompted a quest, first for competitors, and later for suitable regulatory devices. The theory of public utility monopolies, curbed by public regulation, made slow but sure progress in Rochester during these decades.

The first important franchise was that granted to the Rochester Gas Light Company, organized by local men in 1848. The company's early popularity had soon disappeared amidst criticisms of its excessive rates, prompting another group of business men to charter a People's Gas Light Company in 1860. Before this concern could begin construction the older firm had absorbed it, granting at the same time a small reduction in rates and extending services along additional streets. Dissatisfaction revived when rates were again boosted during the Civil War. The city in an effort to keep costs down resorted to oil lamps for the outlying residential areas.

The prospect for competitive checks on light rates frequently revived. A new rival to the Rochester Gas Light Company appeared as a Citizens Gas Company began to construct a plant in 1872. The fears of many citizens (more concerned lest the street surfaces be torn up for new mains than they were over gas bills) were quieted when the new

company bought its rival's mains on the east side, thus dividing the territory. That action left the city without the desired competition, although an increased use of the newly improved kerosene lamps supplied a threat which helped to lower prices. A new competitor, the Municipal Gas Light Company, organized in 1880 by a group of eastern men who held a patent on the new water gas, finally brought a cut in prices. For the first time a second set of mains was made available in several streets. Protests against the inevitable damage to street surfaces were soon coupled with rumors that the new company was an affiliate of the United Gas Improvement Company, a Philadelphia concern seeking to extend control over gas companies throughout the country.

Two additional checks on light rates had meanwhile appeared — natural gas and electricity. Possibly the revived talk of natural gas for Rochester was simply a stratagem of the Philadelphia interests designed to bring the older Rochester companies to terms. At all events the late eighties saw a merging of the three local companies, effected through the purchase of stock control by the United Gas Improvement Company, already a Standard Oil affiliate. Mortimer F. Reynolds, leader of the old Citizens Company, became president of the new Rochester Gas Company of 1891, but most of the other members of the board were eastern men. Price increases were avoided, perhaps because of the threat of electric competition, but the Genesee Valley's natural gas resources were diverted to the larger Buffalo market.

Water power facilities made Rochester a natural center for electric developments. Scarcely two years after the first public demonstration of electric lights at Paris in 1877, a Rochester Electric Light Company was chartered. Yet a dozen other American communities successfully installed arc street lamps before the first 62 were lit in Rochester during 1883 by the Brush Electric Company. Uncertainty as to the proper method for hanging the electric wires had caused delay, but permission to erect poles in the streets was finally granted, despite strong opposition, and poles bearing numerous strands of wire soon lined the downtown streets. The organization of the Edison Electric Illuminating Company in 1886, with plans to supply incandescent lamps at greatly reduced rates for private homes as well as public streets, required the erection of more substantial poles to carry the hundreds of wires needed for its direct current. The popularity of electric light stimulated the rapid extension of these systems, despite reduced rates now offered

by the gas companies. By April, 1888, a truly competitive utopia was reached (though few were satisfied with the result) when the lamp committee announced contracts for the lighting of 105 miles of streets with 1, 677 lamps supplied by three electric companies and 37 miles of streets equipped with 1,277 lamps serviced by three gas companies, at a total cost of \$71,400.

Rapid developments crowded the next few years as the rival companies were progressively consolidated into the Rochester Gas and Electric Company, incorporated in 1892 with a capital of \$4,000,000. Only the Brush Electric Company retained a nominal independence for another seven years. A major spur to consolidation had been the campaign to remove overhead wires. The possibility that an independent company might secure the exclusive right to build an underground conduit brought the competitors together, and the aldermen, unwilling to see the streets torn up for successive conduits, gave a franchise to the Rochester Gas and Electric Company but stipulated that space should be provided for all underground wires. The rapid extension of the underground conduits prompted the installation of hollow metal posts, similar to those on Fifth Avenue, mounted with the newly improved ornamental arc lamps. All of these improvements entailed increased outlays by the city as well as the company, and by 1897 the former's light budget had reached \$212,600. The per capita costs were high, but few cities could boast as excellent a display of street lamps. "The robber, sneak thief, and thug are the only enemies" of this system, concluded the lamp committee.

The threat of monopoly control aroused more violent protests in a closely related field, that of the telephone. An American Union Telegraph Company had secured a limited franchise early in 1880 to erect telephone wires along a few Rochester streets, but the opposition of property owners checked its construction, permitting the more aggressive Bell Telephone Company of Buffalo to gain control of the field by stringing its wires over the housetops. An exchange was established in Rochester and connected with a similar exchange in Buffalo. In 1886, when the company announced a new schedule of charges, popular indignation prompted the mayor to request the withdrawal of the company's franchise. On examination, that document appeared to give the company an unlimited franchise, but this the city attorney held to be beyond the power of any council to grant. Ultimately the Court of Appeals upheld the latter view, but meanwhile the indignant subscrib-

ers, who then numbered 1,000, organized a strike. All Rochester telephones remained silent from November, 1886 until June, 1888, when the company at last agreed to the flat rates prescribed by the council.

Despite its acceptance of public regulation, the telephone company made rapid strides. The extension of services during the nineties saw its wire-mileage reach 2,686 by 1894, when the three electric light companies together boasted only 502 wire-miles. The telephone company's reluctance to extend its lines into the less congested residential areas prompted the organization of the Home Telephone Company by Fred Gleason, backed by local capital determined to afford wider service.

Lax franchises characterized the early years of the street railway developments. Efforts to secure satisfactory rates or services through the establishment of competitive companies proved illusory as the various lines were consolidated in 1892 under the Rochester Railway Company which agreed to accept public regulation and to make a small annual return to the city.*

Repeated recommendations (sometimes from a newspaper editor, occasionally from an alderman, twice at least from the mayor) urged the city to acquire full ownership of one or all of its natural monopolies. The city water system was cited as a fit example of what might be achieved by public ownership of the trolley company, the telephone system, the gas and electric plants. The revenue available from these utilities, it was argued, would not only provide improved services but lighten the regular tax burden. However, other public services, which did not promise revenue returns and therefore did not attract private investors, had to be supplied by the city, and the burden taxed its credit facilities. Arguments that a good revenue project would actually improve the city's credit standing were headed off by two constitutional amendments affecting cities over 100,000, one limiting their borrowing power to 10 per cent, and the other the taxing power to 2 per cent of the assessed valuation. Only the assessment rate remained flexible, and shortly after Rochester's population reached 100,000 in 1885 the authorities found it necessary to make a drastic upward revision of all property assessments. Fortunately, the rapid growth of the city provided a sustaining base for the expanding civic activities, but Rochester never gained the opportunity (enjoyed by some younger western cities) of financing some of its non-revenue services with the returns

**Editor's note:* A fuller account of the history of Rochester's street car lines will be presented in a later issue.

from the more lucrative community functions. Real estate rather than the utilities carried the burden in Rochester.

Rochester was vitally affected by the affairs of several non-local public utilities, notably the area railroads. The city continued to receive a small surplus above the cost of its Genesee Valley Railway bonds, but no returns were forthcoming from its investment in the Nunda line, and the uncertain fortunes of the State Line Railroad prompted the council finally in 1881 to surrender its claims (totalling \$950,000) with the hope that a new management free of this burden could bring the road into operation.

A far more significant civic problem was that presented by the direct line of the New York Central which passed through the heart of the city, crossing many of the principal streets. The mounting casualties at a score of grade crossings prompted the introduction of varied guarding devices, though with little success. Finally, after long negotiations the city agreed to close four minor crossings in return for the elevation of the tracks through the central district. A commission was appointed by legislative act to supervise the project, safeguarding the city's interests. The railroad determined at the same time to build a new and larger station on the east side of the river. As these projects were pressed rapidly to completion in the early 1880's, fundamental changes in the city's downtown pattern took shape, among them a gradual shift of the commercial center to the east side. Less than half the grade crossings over the lesser railroads were eliminated before the close of the century, yet Rochester gained wide praise for the elevation of steam railroads.

Civic Achievements of the Eighties and Nineties

Civic affairs, long recognized as within the province of municipal authorities, became increasingly complex with continued urban growth. Some of the difficulties prompted a reorganization of functions, but the most important "reorganizations" of the last two decades of the century were political rather than constitutional. When, finally at the close of the period, a major charter revision was effected, the centralized administrative power, desired as an alternative to the spoils system, fell into the ready hands of an astute boss.

A minor reorganization occurred through the adoption of the new charter in 1880. The bi-partisan character of the executive board was ended and its number reduced to three elected members with their ad-

ministrative functions enlarged but their power over appropriations abolished. The mayor as a result lost control over the executive board, and perhaps the long career of Mayor Parsons was made possible by the small importance of his office. The executive board controlled the patronage, and it was to that board that young George Aldridge sought and secured election in 1883. Profiting from the political experience of his lately deceased father, young Aldridge soon became the undisputed leader of a Republican faction which was not unwilling to trade favors with the Democratic faction of George E. Raines. While Mayor Parsons continued to win reelection throughout the eighties, even in 1886 when the Republican endorsement was withheld, the Aldridge faction gradually established its ascendancy. Adopting the principal that popular demands for public services should be granted, the Aldridge men pressed ahead with many of the improvements recommended by the mayor, no longer an advocate of economy.

The executive board, despite (perhaps because of) its political character, supervised several long-range developments. The fire department, one of its original functions, developed a new vitality and acquired additional responsibilities. The several steamers which had lost their usefulness in the early days of the Holly system were reconditioned in the late eighties when the growing city extended beyond the reach of the Holly mains. The 42 "minute men" who had helped to operate the steamers in the late seventies were replaced by 19 full-time firemen in 1880, increasing the regular force to 38, assisted by 48 volunteers who continued to man the hose carts until the late nineties. The renewed use of the steamers, stimulated by a survey of Rochester's fire risks made by a recently organized state association of fire underwriters (who boosted local insurance rates) required an increase of the paid force to 100 by 1890 and to 200 by the end of the century. With its budget increasing fourfold, to reach \$220,000 by 1900, the fire department regained its morale, lost in the mid-seventies, and stood forth as a political bodyguard of the first order for boss Aldridge.

The rapid construction of five- and even six-story blocks and factories in the central district not only posed new problems for the fire fighters but presented a new function to the fire marshal. His responsibility for the inspection of theaters and factories, acquired in the late seventies, was extended to tenements, hotels, and workshops in 1882. A detailed report on the fire hazards in 120 buildings inspected that year prompted the construction of outside fire escapes and the pro-

vision of emergency exits. A disastrous fire at the Steam Guage and Lantern Works in 1888 spurred the passage of a more stringent ordinance, requiring iron fire-escape stairs where women worked, more ample and secure platforms, and fire doors. A revision in 1893 directed the marshal to inspect new building plans. Yet when the state required cities of Rochester's class to appoint building inspectors, the newly formed Builders Exchange requested and the council endorsed a petition for the city's exemption from such regulation. The fire marshal protested against new responsibilities in this field in 1899, and more efficient administration of the problem waited upon the new charter.

The improvement and maintenance of the streets, long the most costly civic activity (excepting the public schools), reached new levels of expenditure during these years. One cause lay in the extending street mileage, which grew from 205 to 301 between 1882 and 1896, while the improved mileage increased from 50 to 109. Two stone crushers effected economies in labor costs, and two steam rollers provided better road surfaces, but the equipment boosted outlays. Snow removal became a real problem with the introduction of electric trolleys, for the company could no longer resort to sleighs, and the snow plowed off the tracks had to be removed or scattered evenly in order to keep the road beds open. The executive board, when under attack for its large outlays in 1893-4, surveyed the services afforded and concluded that "Rochester will grow under liberal treatment in its public expenditures and stagnate under false economy, as surely as effect follows cause."

Heavy street expenditures were characteristic of all growing cities, but Rochester had a special burden for bridges. Three of its five river bridges had to be replaced by more substantial structures during the early nineties, and new bridges were built, one at the upper and one at the lower falls. New bridges over the canal were required at several points. These projects, whose cost exceeded half a million dollars, were undertaken only after a protracted agitation finally secured legislative permission for special bond issues, but Rochesterians were learning to take pride in their bridges. Counting the aqueduct and the railroad bridges, the city had 9 river crossings and 26 canal bridges by the close of the period. Fortunately all of the river bridges were so well planned and firmly built that only the smallest required reconstruction during the next half century.

The major problem facing the city in the eighties was the need for a planned sewer system. The old sewers on the west side drained into the river at various points, and the more abundant water supply available since the mid-seventies assured better flushing. But only a small section east of the river enjoyed this advantage. Most of the east side sewers emptied into open ditches at the eastern outskirts, ditches which drained sluggishly across the farms bordering Irondequoit Bay. Damage suits mounted until the total exceeded \$100,000. When a survey in 1880 revealed that 15 per cent of Rochester homes were already equipped with water closets emptying into sewers planned as surface drains, the board of health joined the chorus demanding a remedy.

The problem was so complex that nothing less than a comprehensive plan would suffice. After protracted debate the council voted to pay Emil Kuichling, an able engineer then on the executive board, \$11,000 to make the necessary surveys. Several months of careful work (mapping a trunk sewer, testing the sub-soil problems to be encountered, estimating the relative costs of a discharge into the river, the bay, or the lake, and calculating the population growth of the area to be served) provided data for the model report of 1889 which estimated the cost at \$1,000,000. Despite opposition from an East Side Taxpayers' Association, a bill was eventually pressed through the legislature, authorizing the city to issue the bonds necessary to build the sewer. The cost was to be assessed, after a lapse of ten years, on east side property in proportion to the benefits derived, and paid over a period of fifty years. A commission was created to supervise the work, and by 1894 the great improvement was ready for use, having cost 10 per cent less than the estimate.

Excellent as it was, the water system never seemed to reach completion. When Hemlock water first arrived in 1876, distribution mains were ready in only a few streets, though 2,700 paying services were announced by the end of the year. A drive to extend the mains and close the wells boosted the number of services to 20,000 during the first ten years; consumption increased from 1,760,000 to above 6,000,000 gallons a day. The original conduit had been expected to answer all community needs until 1916, yet 1885 saw the reservoir running low. Lawn sprinkling was prohibited, and breaks in the line as well as household leaks were frantically sought. Complaints were voiced against the 34 horse troughs which had been installed by scattered store or tavern keepers (at sites, many of which later became neighborhood

shopping centers). The rates charged to large industrial users were brought more nearly in line with those of domestic consumers, and the number of meters was increased to 1,500, supplying all industrial and many domestic users, but the proposal that every service be metered was effectively answered when the estimated cost, \$1,680,000, promised to exceed the fund needed for a new conduit.

Under the executive board's direction the water works engineer, J. Nelson Tubbs, made a careful survey of possible new sources. A conduit and pumping plant able to draw 10,000,000 gallons from Lake Ontario each day would cost \$1,490,000 and require \$41,000 annually for operation. A new gravity conduit tapping Hemlock and Canadice Lakes would cost \$1,430,000. A conduit and pumping plant, tapping the same source by a shorter route would cost \$1,280,000, plus operational expenses. A fourth scheme to employ a series of gang and siphon wells located south of the city in the old river valley was likewise considered. Tubbs recommended the third plan, but the Chamber of Commerce, which had sponsored an independent survey, favored an all-gravity conduit tapping Conesus as well as Hemlock and Canadice Lakes.

An extension of the Holly System to outlying factories relieved the Hemlock conduit of the burden of propelling some 67 elevators and 35 other motors, including 3 canal lift bridges, which in 1887 relied on this power, soon to be supplanted by electricity. A comparison of the city's per capita water consumption with that of other cities showed Rochester well ahead of many but not all comparable municipalities. Who could say whether the consumption of 60-odd gallons per person per day was extravagant or simply a decent human standard!

Whether or not the impasse over the water system contributed to the political upset of 1890, Tubbs resigned shortly after the defeat of Mayor Parsons. Emil Kuichling, a Democrat, became chief engineer, a position he retained under succeeding Republican administrations. Permission to borrow \$1,750,000 was secured from the legislature and work on a second gravity conduit, tapping Hemlock and Canadice Lakes was started in 1892. When an advance in the water rates in 1890 failed to cut consumption, the city bought water from a private company operating gang wells until the opening of the new conduit in 1893 increased the daily supply to 23,000,000 gallons of Hemlock water. The construction costs had by this time mounted to over \$6,000,000 and the continued necessity for paying the excessively high 7 per

cent interest on the bonds issued during the seventies raised the total outlay by the mid-nineties to \$10,000,000. Half of this was outstanding in city bonds and the rest had been paid from water rates and taxes. The surplus returned to the treasurer in many cities was lacking in Rochester, where the average citizen continued to demand low water rates, preferring to pay for the water used by fire and other departments through general taxation.

In addition to the executive board, the charter of 1880 provided for the election of a board of education, the appointment of a board of health by the mayor, and boards of police, assessment, and Mount Hope cemetery to be named by the council. Several other boards or commissions were created from time to time, some for specific jobs, as the construction of the trunk sewers, some for continuing functions, as the board of excise and the civil service commission, both provided under general state laws. Perhaps the most important new board organized in Rochester during these years was the park commission.

The development of the Rochester park system was in many respects typical of the community's civic history, for despite a tardy beginning real achievements were made once the function was accepted. As late as 1883, when numerous cities both large and small already boasted sizable parks, the council refused to appropriate funds to develop two properties offered for park use: the 30-acre Lincoln Park on the west side of town, given by D. D. S. Brown, and the 20-acre tract south of the reservoir offered by Ellwanger and Barry. The former gift, which was conditioned on its development within two years, reverted to the donor, but the council did finally, in October, 1887, vote to accept the Ellwanger and Barry gift, which thus became the nucleus of Highland Park. The more determined advocates of public parks had meanwhile secured legislative provision for a park commission empowered to issue \$300,000 in bonds with which to establish a park system.

The 20-man commission, organized in May, 1888, visited the 20-year old Buffalo park system and sought the advice of the nationally famous landscape gardener, Frederick Law Olmsted, and four other experts. With the highlands of the pinnacle hills ruled out by their excessive cost, the river banks, both north and south of the city, were generally regarded by these experts as the city's most promising park areas. Before the end of its first year the commission expended nearly

half its authorized fund in acquiring approximately 400 acres on both banks of the river, north and south of the city.

Criticism gradually disappeared as the parks developed. Their inaccessibility was partially corrected when the Erie as well as the Western New York and Pennsylvania railroads announced excursions to South Park in the summer of 1889, while the Rome, Watertown and Ogdensburg Railway afforded transit to the northern park the next year. In 1892 the Plymouth Avenue trolley reached South Park, renamed Genesee Valley Park; and by 1895 the St. Paul Street trolley was running as far as the ball grounds in Seneca Park on the north side. The more accessible Highland Park opened its Children's Pavilion in 1890.

The succeeding years saw thousands of young trees planted annually, bicycle trails laid out, picnic shelters erected, and other landscaping projects launched. Refreshment stands were built by enterprising concessioners, the Genesee Canoe Club acquired permission to operate a boathouse, a gymnasium was constructed and two athletic fields improved. Popular interest in the 100-odd sheep acquired to crop the grass prompted the addition of a pair of American elk and several deer, rabbits, foxes, owls, and other pioneer residents for Seneca Park in the mid-nineties. A park boulevard system to encircle the city was planned, though only on the south-western outskirts was cooperation forthcoming from the promoters of new subdivisions. Several of the small squares were landscaped; trees were planted on some of the new streets; but Dr. Edward M. Moore, president of the park board, Calvin C. Laney, superintendent, and his young assistant, John Dunbar, the men most responsible for park developments, gave their chief attention to the three principal parks. When an economy drive cut their funds, friends were encouraged to donate special improvements. The first park band concert series was financed in this manner in 1896, the same year that several flower beds were donated. Popular attention was first attracted by the display of 100 varieties of lilacs at Highland Park in 1897. By the end of the century, when the acreage exceeded 600, a tennis court had been graded, a 9-hole golf course laid out, snow cleared from the old ice pond for a skating rink in winter, and a swimming instructor engaged at a special dock on the upper river to assist lads eager to enjoy a cool dip during summer months. No attendance records were as yet available, but the superintendent estimated that 3,000 visited the lilacs one Sunday in 1898. The board was gratified by the increasing popularity of the park facilities.

The activities of the board of health likewise expanded significantly during these years. Shortly after Mayor Parsons first recommended milk inspection in 1881, citing Glasgow as a model, a group of milk dealers cooperated to employ an inspector. The voluntary arrangement, under which each dealer paid a five-dollar license fee to support the inspection of his competitors and check adulteration, was taken over by the council a year later. In 1884 the inspector reported 223 licensed dealers and 360 owners of cows housed within the city. Most of the milk already came from outside, and 108 tests had been made with the "lacometer" on such supplies. When in 1885 a revised ordinance imposed the additional responsibility of examining meat and vegetables, the inspector appointed by the council resigned and the office was abolished. The board of health, which had long sought control over this function, hastened to name its own inspector under authority of a state law, and that officer proceeded with the work, occasionally dumping a can of adulterated milk or confiscating a barrel of tainted meat. By 1890 the monthly inspection of 162 meat markets, 6 fish markets, and 150 milk dealers required the time of two officers. The advance of science had meanwhile awakened concern over the presence of the newly discovered tuberculosis germs in milk or meat. The appointment of young Dr. George W. Goler as medical inspector in 1892 brought a skilled specialist into the city's service just as a renewed threat of cholera appeared.

Earlier board of health functions were becoming increasingly complex. The investigation of complaints against outhouses continued, and in 1884/5 the public officers had to clean out 2,660 privies. The vaccination of all factory workers as well as school children was undertaken a year later to head off a possible epidemic of smallpox. Protests against a phosphate storehouse, a stock yard and slaughter house, and a garbage reduction plant prompted the board to order their removal beyond the city limits. Frequent investigations of crowded tenements, usually stimulated by a threatened epidemic, spurred the improvement of their sanitary facilities, but the board's request for additional authority to restrict the number of persons per room was denied. The overcrowding of poor immigrants in dilapidated and unsanitary blocks could only be checked when a contagion or fire hazard appeared. Meanwhile, success crowned the protracted campaigns for the appointment of women physicians, for the licensing of midwives, for the oper-

ation of a public ambulance, and finally in 1899 for the establishment of a public bathhouse.

When the collection of garbage, taken from the health board in 1880, was returned to its charge the next year, the eight double teams employed to haul improved garbage wagons were each assigned to specific areas of the city. The delivery of the swill to neighboring farms was supervised by a special committee appointed by the board. After 15 years of varied performance the increased supply forced the board to seek a new market. A contract was made with the Flower City Reduction Company in 1896, and a plant erected in Chili. Dissatisfaction with the company's methods of collection prompted the board to cancel the contract after a two-year trial. By this time profits were beginning to appear in such work, and a sharp struggle ensued between the council, the board, and the reduction company. Though a temporary, month-by-month contract was granted in 1899, the issue remained for settlement by the board of contract and supply created by the White Charter a year later.

Another conflict of authority occurred between the board of police and the excise commission. When the reviving strength of the temperance forces prompted the council to enact more stringent regulations of saloons and amusement centers, the police protested their inability to enforce the laws because of the character of men granted licenses by the excise board. The fees were doubled in the mid-eighties, sharply reducing the number of dealers, but no effort was made to enforce the Sunday closing law. Mayor Parsons, held responsible for these conditions, suffered defeat in 1890 when his Democratic rival pledged enforcement of the regulations. A determined effort to close all saloons on the Sabbath was made by Mayor Carroll in 1890, but four and six years later the issue was revived. By the latter date, when friction between the two boards had disappeared, the police and the excise commissioners cooperated in raiding Silver Street dives, Midway saloons, "Murders' Row," and other centers of vice and crime. The passage of the Raines law in 1896, by exempting hotels from the Sunday closing law, complicated the enforcement problem. Meanwhile, a sharp increase in the license fees, boosting the returns from \$21,000 in 1880, to \$54,000 in 1890, and to \$165,000 by 1898, more than paid the costs of poor relief.

The police force expanded from 90 to 200 between 1880 and 1900. The city was divided into four precincts in 1886, the same year that

the first police matron was appointed. Police headquarters moved in 1895 from the city hall basement into a \$76,000 building erected across Exchange Street from the new jail, recently completed by the county. The annual budget of the police department, mounting from \$59,000 in 1879 to \$186,000 two decades later, reflected the increased complexity of urban life.

The problems of poor relief seemed likewise to be growing more complex. Ten new charitable organizations, including a free Provident Dispensary, an Infant Summer Hospital, a Red Cross chapter, and four additional hospitals, reflected the urban trends. The city's charitable institutions numbered twenty-five by the late nineties, when already a Society for the Organization of Charity was endeavoring to coordinate their services. Of the \$130,000 expended by fifteen of these institutions in 1889, nearly one fourth was received from the city for the care of paupers. The largest outlays were for hospital expenses. In the midst of the depression of 1893 a special poor fund raised by the Chamber of Commerce totaled barely \$12,000. Half of the city's outlay of \$80,828 in 1893/4 was expended in normal institutional charges which did not relate to the economic emergency. The Council did appoint a committee to consider the fate of the unemployed, and a stone yard was opened as an aid in sorting the worthy from the lazy poor. But the city's stone crushing machine could break rock at less cost than the unemployed, and the poor committee turned its attention to the perfections of new methods of inspection in order to eliminate improper charges. Of the 2,902 families seeking relief in 1894/5, an unprecedented number, 2,212, were given outdoor assistance, while 452 received institutional care, the rest being judged unworthy.

Fortunately, the indirect public aid was more considerable. Construction work was in progress on the sewers, the bridges, the second Hemlock conduit, and several street pavements. Special work relief jobs were launched in the parks in the spring of 1894. The county's plan for a new court house had likewise progressed, and a \$295,000 contract was let that spring. Yet, despite these public works, a considerable amount of unemployment continued during the mid-nineties, with neither the state nor the federal authorities ready to assume responsibility. The major burden for society's economic ills still fell on the unfortunate individuals.

A variety of lesser problems joined with more serious issues to emphasize the need for improved civic administration. Complaints

in the late eighties against the smoke nuisance, petitions for a public market, agitation for a city library—these among other issues would require action in the early future.

The retarded development of the Rochester schools, when compared with many other cities, was likewise evident throughout these years. Sylvanius A. Ellis, superintendent from 1882 to 1892 (having previously served from 1869 to 1876), made an earnest effort to emulate the achievements of Quincey and other progressive cities. Yet the rapid increase in the school population from 8,227 in 1877 to 17,024 in 1890 and to 24,280 in 1899, focussed attention on the housing problem. Although the number and size of the school buildings both increased (and approximately 10,000 were cared for in parochial schools by 1900), additional rooms in store lofts and homes had to be rented annually. With the school budget mounting rapidly, from \$135,000 in 1870 to \$481,316 in 1890 and to \$735,473 in 1900, the school board became a choice berth for ward politicians. Several unsavory scandals aroused public indignation, and three board members resigned under fire at different times. That many teachers had previously been selected on political grounds was freely admitted in 1894 when the board professed to adopt a new policy, specifying the qualifications required. So many teachers had been engaged that the budget compelled low salaries, particularly for the women. The inefficiency of the 24-man board was evident in the letting of contracts, in the selection of sites (three of which were later abandoned), in the construction of poorly planned additions to outmoded schools, and in the annual deficits which frequently compelled the teachers to wait several months for their salaries. A determined movement for school reform developed in the mid-nineties, exerting a powerful influence on political and charter developments generally.

A series of investigations by an able accountant, John Bower, disclosed irregularities in several city departments. Most startling was a deficiency of \$130,000 in the treasurer's account in 1890. Although half of this was quickly restored, the loss was sufficient to send John A. Davis, the treasurer, to prison for five years. Less serious malpractices in the poor and the school departments further emphasized the need for reform. Both John Bower and S. B. Williams, the next city treasurer, declared the city finances to be in a sound condition, with the capital value of improvements greater than the debt. Nevertheless the appointment of a comptroller and a purchasing agent was recom-

mended, and a more efficient budgeting procedure was strongly urged. For a time John Bower was employed by the council to make monthly examinations of the treasurer's books and other official records. A group of citizens, including leaders of the Chamber, drew up a proposed new charter, drafted by John Bower, which sought to divide legislative from administrative functions, giving the mayor responsibility for the appointment of department heads who would displace the executive board and other commissions.

Despite the favor which the Bower charter aroused in Rochester, its defeat in the legislature was secured by the Aldridge faction. In order to demonstrate his hold on the city George Aldridge himself became a candidate for mayor in 1894, winning through the support of Democratic friends. In the next contest a Good Government Club, composed of such Republicans as Joseph T. Alling and James Johnston, backed George E. Warner, the candidate of the Jeffersonian Democrats. Warner's victory precipitated a bitter fight between the Aldridge-controlled council and the mayor, with Warner upholding the authority of the civil service board, which he appointed. Other issues involved the board of education and the new charter. When Warner won a second term in 1898, Aldridge determined to seek a reconciliation with the insurgents in his own party. Alling's school amendment, establishing a board of five to be elected at large, designed to free it from ward politics, and the Chamber's charter reforms, now embodied in the White Charter applicable to all second class cities, were accepted and pressed through the legislature. Many Good Government Club backers were attracted to the support of George A. Carnahan, an acceptable Republican, as a violent campaign against Warner, charged with failure to enforce the law against the sale of liquor on the Sabbath, returned the city administration to the control of a chastened boss who had learned a valuable lesson.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Readers of *Rochester History* will recognize this number as a continuation of the April, 1943, issue: "Civic Developments of Rochester's First Half Century: 1817-1867." Lack of space prevents the inclusion of references which interested students are invited to consult at the Historian's Office.

